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LOYOLA COMPASS

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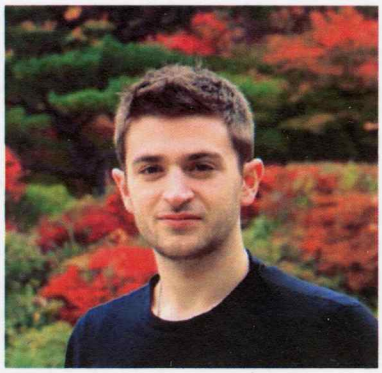
Teaching English in Japan

By Daniel Bromberg

(BA History, Loyola International College, 2010)



Have you ever wondered what it would be like to wake up in the morning in a country where you didn't speak or understand the native language? Or perhaps somewhere where you could spend your weekends walking along deserted beaches, golden avenues of Roman civilization, or even amongst ancient castles or exotic wonders? In the current "Age of Globalization," the unknown world has never been more at our fingertips.

Working and living abroad is a dream some of us aspire to accomplish at some stage of our lives. Working and living abroad can provide us with a unique opportunity to experience an entirely new culture while continuing to fuel our thrilling sense of adventure. It is this desire, this burning sensation deep within that drives us to reach beyond the limits of the current economic recession and seek employment abroad.

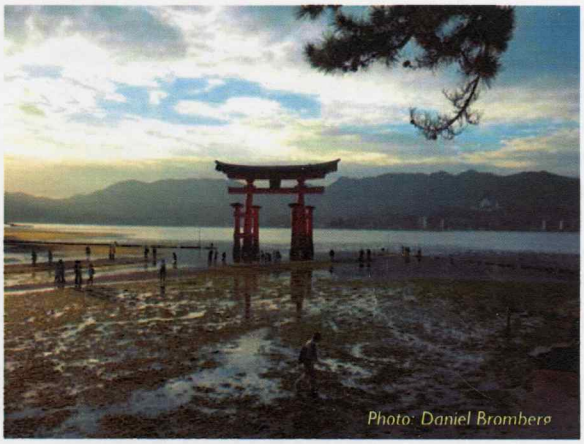


Photo: Daniel Bromberg

While completing my last year of university, in pursuit of a joint Arts & Science degree (major Honours History program, minor Diversity & the Contemporary World at Loyola International College), I knew I had to make a decision regarding my immediate future. Ever since I'd returned from my seven-month stint in Europe two years prior, I counted down the days until I'd be "free" from responsibility and have the chance to travel once again – not to any particular location or for any specific reason, but simply because I needed to quench my thirst for travel.

And so began the search for something new, something that would provide not only an opportunity to earn a respectable salary, but also valuable work experience to use for potential future employment.

For some time, Japan has been a place in my mind that represented the perfect world apart – a place that had isolated itself from Western influence for so long thus successfully keeping intact its cultural identity and traditions. I was also drawn to the aesthetic beauty of Kyoto's temples and the hyper-technology and neon lights of Tokyo's streets; an impressive geological composition which features thousands of natural hot springs and the towering peaks of the Japan Alps and the delicious food I have come to love. Sprinkle in an incredibly safe atmosphere and friendly population, mix it all up, and you will have found yourself in the Far Eastern country of Japan, the land of the rising sun.

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It was this search that prompted the discovery of the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme, which offers one-year teaching employment contracts – with the possibility of future extensions – to undergraduates of any field. The only requirements are to have an undergraduate degree and to be at ease in using the English language. Luckily enough, I fit those criteria just fine. After a lengthy application process, I was finally accepted and received my placement location and date of departure. I would be leaving on August 24th for Hyogo Prefecture, located in the Kansai area (Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe) of Japan. It was exactly what I wanted! Hyogo is known as "Miniature Japan" for the fact that it shares everything that can be found across the archipelago – mountains, beaches, onsen resorts, and much more. From Kakogawa, a semi-urban city tucked carefully between the Inland Sea, the Rokko mountain range, and the rural region of Tajima, travel to many destinations is greatly facilitated by its proximity to several major cities and Kansai International Airport. In fact, it takes only thirty minutes from my humble abode to Kobe, an hour to Osaka, and exactly ninety minutes to central Kyoto. On top of that, one of the most exciting baseball teams in the country, the Hanshin Tigers, play at Koshien stadium, a magnificent setting for baseball zealots of any nationality. Anyone who knows me will know that this alone was a huge selling point!

Working as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) in Japan has already proven to be a remarkable experience. In just under three months, I have learned two out of the three Japanese alphabets (the third one being Chinese characters), in an attempt to break down the language barrier which separates me from the rest of the community. At the same time, I am slowly beginning to feel as though I'm making a difference with my high school students. While the basic requirements and structure of the education system in Japan proved extremely frustrating during the first few weeks, I learned to accept the things I cannot change and act on my instincts to cultivate the minds of these youth to the best of my ability, for as long as I am a member of this community. Since coming to terms with these initial hurdles in my new work environment, I have now grown to love this responsibility and cherish it wholeheartedly.

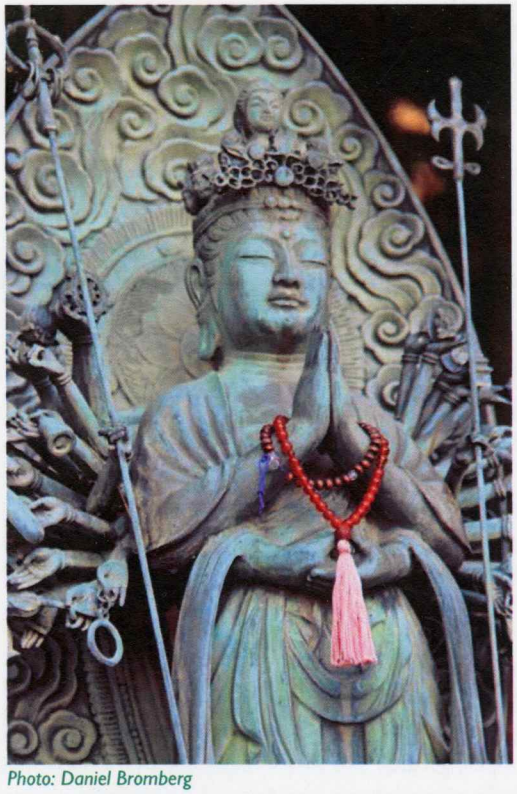

Photo: Daniel Bromberg

Sure, I have had plenty of challenges getting to this point of comfort, but I feel as though if I can achieve such a feat in a short time, then anyone else can do the same. Culture shock will only affect you if you remain close-minded and ignorant to the truth. The simple fact is that people are different. If you continuously stare in awe and wonder at the mysterious things which cross your path, then of course you will feel shock or confusion as an immediate reaction. However, I believe that your experience will not suffer from such instances if you come to accept the social norms or behavioural customs of any society or institution, for instead it will only serve to enlighten your spirit and broaden your knowledge of the world which surrounds us. Truly, there is no way to discover yourself until you discover the world. Similarly, removing yourself from the cultures and traditions you have always known will not only proffer new, long-lasting friendships with people who possess the same ambition as you, but will also help you discover things you never imagined.

To all those who remain unsure about which direction to take in the near future, I encourage you to open your minds to the possibility of teaching English in a foreign country. There are hundreds of options available, however, unlike many other countries, Japan does not require a teaching certificate to be employed – only an undergraduate diploma – so it is possible even without any teaching experience! If studying for a teaching certificate is not a priority for you, this may be something to consider. Meanwhile, the looming deadline for re-contracting for a second year quickly approaches. And although my original plans were to only stay one year – strictly for the experience of living in Japan – the benefits of working abroad, just like the fall leaves, have started showing their true colours. Who knows where I'll go from here? But never mind… this is only *my* story. It's time to write your own.

If you would like to learn more about Daniel's experience with JET and working in Japan, visit his blog at http://mynxbrom.blogspot.com

Creativity through Action

By Curtis McKinney (Captain of the Stingers Rugby Team)
Currently in Program
(Major Political Science, Minor Diversity in the Contemporary World, Member of Loyola International College)

I was recently asked to write an article about why I play rugby and reflect on the benefits one receives from participating in athletics. I was not satisfied by my original trite conclusion of why people play sports because it is better for one's health. Close questioning of this reveals that health is a mere secondary result. If health was important to me, I would not play rugby. Instead, swimming a couple times a week or going to the gym for the beach body would suffice. Why do I and others play rugby or any other sport? We play because a game affords us the chance to control and create a scenario to our liking. Our concern is not for the future or what happened in the past but is entirely based in the present. Athletes are inspirational because they have the ability to affect an outcome. In my opinion, an athlete is someone who engages in creativity through action rather than words.

Actions equate to phrases which are relied upon for the practice of creation. An athlete trains his/her body to react to what the mind interprets. Core muscles fire in anticipation, hips sink and shoulders flex, one foot positions itself to cut the opponent in half, the other leg is cocked to explode through, mind is clear for a quarter note rest prior to finishing off the symphony completed by the opponent, who re-describes his/her reality through a forced breath escaping the lungs. An individual trains his/her body to engage in a sequence of movements through repetition. In the same way a student who is well prepared for an exam can recall answers quickly, practicing a sport works on a person's muscle memory.

Photo: Stephan Jahanshahi

Team sports must take muscle memory to the next level. Instead of working with one body, a number of bodies must work together in the same way muscles anticipate an action. No one phrase can describe a team, rather it is a conversation. A team will go through various re-descriptions from week to week based on the environment and team dynamic being constantly in flux. For example, if someone gets injured, how does the replacement player change the cohesion of the line? How do the other players have to adjust? There are numerous circumstances that challenge the unity of a team. And this is why team sports are so special, because anyone who has played has been a part of those rare moments when a group of people silently engaged in the present as a whole. These moments are strokes of genius that can be recognized from afar. Every trainer, therapist and coach works hard throughout a season to create and re-create those moments. Trainers challenge an athletes' ability of what they can do with their bodies. Therapists remedy restrictions preventing a player from pursuing their goal. And coaches apply a system in which creative action can be expressed as a unit. All parts are engaged together for that moment of brilliance rendering everyone in a split second of awe. And through sport, in the silences in which we work, we are constantly challenged to overcome previously conceived limits further enabling us to describe ourselves on our own terms.

News and Events

Ten Weeks to Playing Guitar (levels 101 and 102)

Loyola International College will be offering FREE 10-week guitar courses throughout the winter semester! Guitar 101 is ideal for beginners. This course will provide the basics of guitar including how to play chords, how to play songs and the rudiments of music theory. Guitar 101 will meet every Wednesday from 2:45-4:00 pm in room AD 506. Guitar 102 will be offered for those who can already play guitar but would like to learn how to read sheet music, play classical pieces and understand music theory. This class will meet every Monday from 2:45-4:00 pm.

These courses are free, courtesy of your guitar instructor Lauren Sedbon, although there may be one (inexpensive) book purchase for the course, and you are required to bring your own guitar. Those who intend on joining the class should be serious about learning to play the guitar and ready to attend each class. Open to LIC and non-LIC members. For more details or to register for the course, please contact Cristina at 514-848-2424 (ext. 2125). Deadline for registration is January 14, 2011.

Cooking with the Profs

In an effort to build community while having fun, and eating great food, Loyola International College would like to invite you to our "Cooking with the Profs" workshop. Professor Rosemarie Schade will host this event, which will take place on Saturday, January 29 at 5:30 pm at her house in NDG. Space is limited so please register at the LIC office before January 25, 2011.

The 6th Concordia – Siena Conference

Thursday, March 24 and Friday, March 25, 2011

Theme: Transnational Economic and Environmental Justice [with U.S.-Canada issues]

We are happy to announce that the 6th Concordia – Siena Conference will be held at Siena College (NY) this year. Those interested in attending the conference are urged to contact us as soon as possible. Loyola International College in collaboration with LICSA would like to extend this trip to include a visit of New York City on Saturday, March 26th and Sunday, March 27th. Please contact the office for more information. If you would like to be part of this fieldtrip, please let us know before Tuesday, February 1, 2011.

Reminder - LOYC 398A: Borderlands

Please remember to register for POLI 398I/LOYC 398A Borderlands which will be taught in Winter 2011, as space is still available. For the purpose of this course, the LICSA funded computer in AD 504 has been equipped with a webcam and a microphone so that students can use Google Chat to communicate with their Siena counterparts across the border. Keep in mind that the same university network rules apply to the use of this computer (e.g. not allowed to use Skype, etc).

The Loyola Compass is published by Loyola International College. Its mandate is to provide current information on the many activities of the College. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Faculty or the University.